

POLICY BRIEF

Sweetening the Deal: Adding Value to the New Deal for Fragile States through CSO Engagement

UN Photo/WFP

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) was established in 2008 following a recommendation of the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Accra, Ghana. The IDPS is the result of previous conversations between donors and developing countries on the challenges of aid effectiveness in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) and broader dialogue about creating lasting peace and sustainable development globally. It seeks to bring together FCAS governments and their donor partners to exchange views on country-level experiences, build consensus around fundamental principles and good practice related to peacebuilding and statebuilding, and identify realistic objectives for action (IDPS 2009). Representatives from donor and FCAS governments make up the membership of the IDPS. They are joined by representatives of multilateral agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs), who have limited roles. Due to the state-centric structure of the IDPS, the full potential of CSOs to contribute and add value to the process is not being realized. More meaningful engagement with CSOs, including the clarification of the structure of that engagement, could lead to better outcomes for both the IDPS and the implementation of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.¹

CSO Participation in the IDPS to Date

At first glance, CSOs have been quite involved in the IDPS process. Their participation was noted in the original concept paper for the IDPS, they have participated in all three major meetings since its creation, and CSOs were identified as focal points during the national consultations that fed into the development of the New Deal. References to civil society appear in all three official statements by the IDPS—the Dili Declaration,² the Monrovia Roadmap on Peacebuilding

This policy brief outlines the ways that civil society organizations are currently involved in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and the value that they could add to making the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States a success.

Afghan men work on a road construction.



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1 The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States sets out a new paradigm for how donors and FCAS governments should interact. It hinges on five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals intended to identify priorities at the country level and help track progress as development assistance is disbursed and programs are implemented. For the full text, see IDPS (2011a).

2 See IDPS (2010) for the full text.

The problem of integrating CSOs based in fragile states is exacerbated by their preference to spend their limited resources on their essential functions rather than engage in a faraway process the value of which may not be obvious

and Statebuilding,³ and the New Deal. Civil society representatives have also been involved in the steering committee and working groups of the IDPS, meeting regularly with their government and multilateral counterparts to plan and implement the New Deal.

However, meaningful participation by CSOs has been limited for three reasons. First, the IDPS process is mainly focused on national governments. Government representatives sit at IDPS meetings as full members, whereas civil society representatives sit as participants without equal status or influence over process and planning. Indeed, the original concept paper for the IDPS indicated that “participation of ... CSOs at international meetings will be decided on a case-by-case basis” (ibid.). It goes on to explain that civil society perspectives will be “channelled into the dialogue through their participation in national consultations and in [a] high-level expert panel” (ibid.). Structural constraints such as these lead to confusion about whether or not civil society representatives can be in the room or sitting at the table and how many of them can be there. The number of civil society representatives allowed at the table is particularly important since dozens of CSOs working internationally and locally often try to coordinate their activities and messages.

Second, although CSO involvement in the IDPS has gone beyond the role described in the original concept paper, the speed at which the at-times-haphazard IDPS process occurs has posed further obstacles. The need for CSOs to coordinate with each other and respond to requests from the IDPS has meant that few CSOs from fragile states have been able to contribute to the process. Engagement with the IDPS has to date been coordinated by a few organizations based in developed countries that have been able to make staff available to work on the process. It is encouraging that the core group of CSOs⁴ has focused its attention in 2012 on engaging more fully with CSOs based in fragile states with considerable success.

Third, the problem of integrating CSOs based in fragile states is exacerbated by their preference to spend their limited resources on their essential functions rather than engage in a faraway process the value of which may not be obvious. CSO engagement is impossible without resources to cover the costs of time and expenses, regardless of where they are based. Funding for civil society participation is likely to come from individual donors. Until the modest budget of the IDPS is increased, it will be unable to support civil society participation.

An Alternative Model: Lessons from Rio+20

A useful comparison to make to CSO engagement in the IDPS process is the way that civil society was and continues to be engaged in the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. The UN’s Agenda 21 action plan issued at the end of the Earth Summit in 1992 divides civil society into nine major groups in the context of negotiations on sustainable development.⁵ Subsequently, the UN General Assembly resolution calling for the Rio+20 conference “encourages the participation of all Major Groups at all stages of the preparatory process and gives them a formal role both in the preparatory process and the Conference itself” (UNCSD 2012).

Identification of the equality of civil society and the state in the Rio+20 process reflects the recognition in the Accra Agenda for Action that CSOs are “development actors in their own right” (HLF-3 2008). CSO participation in the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea—where the New Deal was endorsed—as “equal development actors alongside governments and donors” (HLF-4 2011) reinforces this understanding.

These recent developments provide two lessons for the IDPS process. First, they could help put into practice the language concerning the importance of the relationship between the state and civil society, which is highlighted in all the major statements of the IDPS. Second, robust state engagement with civil society could help build ownership of the IDPS

3 For the full text, see IDPS (2011b).

4 The core group of CSOs was led by InterPeace until mid-2012. It is now co-coordinated by Cordaid and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. The North-South Institute has participated in the core group since late 2011.

5 The major groups are: women, children and youth, indigenous people and their communities, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community, and farmers.



Humberto De Albuquerque, and his colleague, prepare to climb a radio transmission tower repaired by UNMIT, in Aimutin, Timor-Leste.

process at the local level. Building local ownership of peacebuilding and state-

building would increase the legitimacy of state institutions and contribute to a more sustainable peace. As mediators between the state and the grassroots, CSOs can play an important role in helping to develop the sense among individuals that they have a stake in these processes. They also serve as a conduit for integrating country-level experiences into international processes such as the IDPS.

How CSOs Can Add Value

In addition to serving as a means to mediate between governments and local populations and help develop ownership of the IDPS process, CSOs can add significant value to the IDPS and implementation of the New Deal in particular. As noted in the New Deal, CSOs play an important role by holding governments to account and fostering open and inclusive political dialogue. They can also:

- Raise awareness of the IDPS, the New Deal, and the process for implementing it in developed and developing countries and internationally.
- Help identify the root causes of conflict and fragility, topics that have so far been neglected in the IDPS process (InterPeace 2012a).

- Contribute to the development of IDPS tools such as the fragility spectrum and indicators to measure progress on the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals.
- Monitor pilot programs that implement the New Deal and progress on achieving the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals.
- Refocus the IDPS away from a technical conversation about better aid to a dialogue on better development based on country-level experiences.

In order to achieve successful implementation of the New Deal, make the most of the IDPS, and take full advantage of the potential of CSOs to help in those processes, the IDPS and its member governments should:

- Welcome CSOs as full members of the IDPS on equal footing with state members. This could involve the appointment of two civil society representatives on each of the bodies of the IDPS, including the Steering Committee and working groups.⁶ Representatives should be nominated by the core group of CSOs engaging with the IDPS process and include at least one member from a developing country.
- Clarify the rules and procedures for IDPS meetings and provide sufficient time for all members and participants to reflect, consult, and provide high-quality feedback on draft documents.
- Provide reasonable, predictable funding to the IDPS, with specific budget lines for the participation and coordination of CSOs, including funds for travel to meetings and time.
- Integrate domestic and international CSOs into frameworks for implementing and monitoring progress on the New Deal at country and global levels.

Robust state engagement with civil society could help build ownership of the IDPS process at the local level

⁶ The IDPS has established two working groups, one promoting the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals, and the other focusing on practical implementation and monitoring of the New Deal (InterPeace 2012a).

- Explore ways that functions of the IDPS and g7+⁷ secretariats, such as drafting documents and managing the IDPS process, could be streamlined and consider consolidating secretariat functions for the IDPS with those of the g7+ as part of putting language in the New Deal and other statements on country-led and country-owned processes into practice.
- Recommit to a wider dialogue through the IDPS and refocus discussions away from technical questions of aid delivery to a broader conversation about peacebuilding and statebuilding as part of the development process and rooted in country-level experiences. 

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⁷ The g7+ is a group of 17 fragile states working together to share experiences and promote more effective engagement in FCAS. See www.g7plus.org.

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The North-South Institute would like to thank the Canadian International Development Agency for its core grant and the International Development Research Centre for its program and institutional support grant to NSI.